



July 1, 2021

Dear JMLBA Members, Sponsors, and Allies:

Words cannot describe how honored and humbled we are to have the privilege to serve as members of the leadership team of the John Mercer Langston Bar Association (JMLBA) for the 2021–2022 membership year. Nearly a quarter century has passed since Black attorneys from the Columbus metropolitan area came together to form JMLBA—Central Ohio’s first unified bar association for Black lawyers.

Since that time, a great deal of change has happened in our community, city and nation, but JMLBA’s mission and purpose has remained the same: to further the legacy of our namesake, John Mercer Langston, by promoting professional development, networking, mentoring, and community activism. Last year’s leadership put into place a framework that set a clear path for JMLBA’s future. For this, we cannot thank you enough. We are grateful for your dedication and service to JMLBA and honored to continue your legacy of excellence in leadership. It is now up to us to use that framework to build JMLBA into one of the preeminent affinity bar associations in the nation.

In some ways, we find ourselves in a much different place than this time last year. For many of us, the last year was a difficult and painful one: The world is still recovering from an unprecedented health pandemic that once again highlighted significant disparities that persist in Black communities across the country, including our own in Central Ohio. Simultaneously, despite the national outrage that followed the senseless deaths of Black folks, we continued to witness horrific events play out in our own community. And while our country’s need for the long-overdue awakening on racial equality was met with a renewed racial justice movement, we saw the pledges and commitments of many of America’s corporations fall flat. We watched a presidential election leave our nation absolutely divided in its wake and attacks on our democracy reminded us that racial double standards remain firmly in place in this country.

Yet, through these storms, we persevere. In the face of turmoil, we demonstrated resilience at unprecedented levels. As our nation and city continue to reopen, we are full of hope. Though we may never return to what we once deemed “normal,” we are filled with excitement—excitement to lean into change, while also embracing the opportunity to reconnect with our community in a way for which we have yearned this past year. Still, we remain vigilant and determined: we march onward in the cultivation of lasting and meaningful transformation, for the issues Black people face every day in our county are deep rooted and long lasting. As the late John Lewis reminded us “transformation will not happen right away. Change... rarely happens all at once.”

To Our Sponsors and Allies: We thank you for your continued support through an unpredictable year. When we reconceptualized our annual Gala, shifting to a virtual platform, not only did you adapt with us, you rose to the occasion with record-setting charitable contributions to JMLBA.

Your role remains critical to our organization and to the advancement of Black people in the legal community. Last year, we asked you to remove the barriers in your respective organizations, educate yourselves, and make sincere programmatic—not merely performative—change. As you continue to implement these changes, we challenge you to use your resources and reputations to build a more equitable and inclusive world: examine your policies, processes, and systems to ensure they drive accountability and transparency from decision-makers; identify the existing processes that undermine systemic change in your organizations; conduct pay and origination-credit equity audits; develop measurable diversity-related goals and publish the data; prioritize the mental health of your Black employees; develop concrete commitments to partner with and support Black-owned businesses. Disrupt the status quo.

To Our Community: It sometimes feels like a miracle that we are here, given the systems designed to oppress us. But there is beauty in the resilience of Black people, and in the resourcefulness of our community. As we expand upon our commitment to be a resource to you, we look forward to working together to develop relationships with community stakeholders and advancing the well-being of our community. We are excited for opportunities to educate, empower, and in the words of John Lewis, to “make some noise and get in good trouble.” Our commitment to you remains one of focused and prioritized service in the fight against racial injustice. We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged countless businesses, including Black-owned businesses, across our city and nation. Therefore, we are more eager than ever to seek out opportunities to collaborate with each other and connect resources within our community.

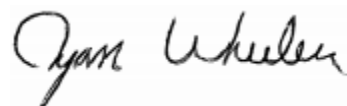
To Our Members: Thank you for your commitment to our organization and your continued engagement. While adapting to the challenges of the past year, you stuck with us, and for that we cannot even begin to express our gratitude. Whether in person or in virtual spaces, we look forward to crafting new ways to connect with you. Our goal for this year is to not only create a space for you, but to create lasting connections and serve as a reminder that you are not alone on this journey. With these aims in mind, we look forward to launching new programming initiatives and continuing the legacy of the strong initiatives from years past. As you know, our organization is at its best when we collaborate and work together. Please continue to reach out and share your ideas, experiences, aspirations, and insights, so we can continue to best tailor the membership experience to your needs. Amanda Gorman sent chills down our spines this past January as the youngest inaugural laureate: “For there is always light. If only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.” Thank you for being a light in our organization and community, as we continue the fight for justice and equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. We look forward to working with you this year.

Sincerely,



Arryn K. Miner
President



Ryan E. Wheeler
President-Elect